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September 13, 2004

Indiana Office of Utility Consumer Counselor
100 N. Senate Avenue Room N501
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2215

Dear Sir,

This letter is written to voice our support of legislation/regulation that would reduce the amount of deposit/reconnect fees which are charged to a resident before their NIPSCO service can be restored. As Township Assistance investigator/caseworkers, we daily come in contact with people unable to pay their rising utility bills and/or those whose service has already been disconnected.

It seems an obvious observation that if someone did not have the money to pay monthly on their NIPSCO, they certainly would not have access to a large lump sum needed to restore the service. Often our client has recently moved into the dwelling and the deposit is determined by prior usage which may or may not be what the current resident would use. Another scenario is the client who has not had a utility in their name consequently is unable to establish independent living situations, accept subsidized housing or move from a shelter without paying a very large deposit. It is equally obvious that NIPSCO does need to cover the expenses of service calls and personnel and charge a deposit amount that offers some incentive to avoid disconnection as a common occurrence. Do these expenses equal the amounts of deposits/reconnection fees? It seems unlikely.

Township assistance can cover the actual gas usage when the client has been determined eligible by our guidelines. **We cannot pay any deposits or reconnection fees.** The amount we can pay still does not get this service restored. Our only recourse is to refer the client to area churches and social service agencies for the remaining amount, which is often much more than the actual gas usage! This puts an unreasonable burden on these agencies, diverting funds that are already stretched way to thin. **We feel that four times the average monthly bill is an excessive charge for deposits.** We also request that consideration be given to lowering the amount of the established deposit or splitting it into payments when a township/church/agency is able to make a pledge for the actual gas usage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Linda Fuller, Township Assistance Supervisor
St. Joseph Township Trustee Office

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INDIANA OFFICE OF UTILITY
CONSUMER COUNSELOR